MAY / VOLUME 12 / ISSUE 124 / $1.95

Rock Express

Talking Heads
NATURAL SELECTION

IRON MAIDEN FOREVER HEAVY

JONI MITCHELL SOUL'S AWASH

MORRIS DAY SUAVE SOPHISTICATE

STREETBEAT
INTERNATIONAL REGIONAL REPORT

PRINTED IN CANADA

COMPLIMENTS OF Sam Goody 1040732

ALONE TOGETHER

THE TALKING HEADS HAVE BECOME SOMETHING OF AN ODD ENTITY. EACH SUGGESTS THAT THE BAND IS HIS FIRST PRIORITY. AND YET, WITH ALL THE TALKING HEADS WORKING ON INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS, ACTUALLY ROUNDING THEM UP IN THE SAME ROOM BECOMES QUITE A FEAT. COULD SOMETHING BE WRONG?

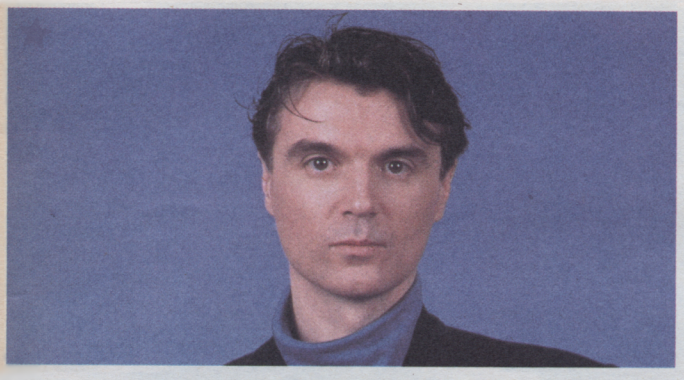
Interviews by IAIN BLAIR

Photography by DEBORAH FEINGOLD

WHAT'S WRONG with this picture?

David Byrne of Talking Heads is sitting in a trendy L.A. restaurant, picking at a salad and pondering the problem of writing meaningful lyrics. "It's a lonely, introspective business," he sighs.

What's wrong is that the 36-year-old singer is neither dressed like the intellectual nerd he's purported to be (he's smartly attired in a black silk suit and shirt), nor does he twitch neurotically when a pretty waitress approaches and shyly asks for an autograph. Instead, he smiles and happily obliges, even pausing for a little small talk.



'I'D LIKE TO keep going with the music and keep a balance. The problem isn't conceptual. It's the scheduling that gets tough with the other band members. That gets to be a whole job in itself'

David Byrne

Can this be the same man who sang *Psycho Killer* so chillingly that he has been characterized by many people ever since as aloof, bizarre, cerebral and totally divorced from such mundane star/fan interactions as signing autographs?

"Well, a guy did attack me in Germany recently for being too happy these days," Byrne comments cheerfully. "He told me the new stuff is 'far too pleasant. There's not enough suffering.' He much preferred our earlier records where there's lots of angst."

So what's wrong with this sound? Put on Talking Heads' intriguingly titled new album, *Naked*, and there are the trademark rhythms and infectious grooves percolating beneath Byrne's familiar clenched vocal delivery. But listen to tracks like *Mr. Jones*, *Flowers* or *Totally Nude* and it seems as though the German fan might be right. Where's the angst?

Instead of the stuttering, nervous explorations of emotional tension that Head fans have come to know and love, these songs softly sway to Caribbean rhythms and exude a tropical warmth and happiness noticeably missing from the band's earlier, edgier albums.

Even Byrne's lyrics are more relaxed. Consider *Flowers*, a song he describes as "a nostalgic look back at our civilization once Mother Nature has totally reclaimed the land." It's hard to imagine the Byrne of a few years ago sounding this wistful — "Years ago/I was an angry young man/ I'd pretend/That I was a billboard/ Standing tall/By the side of the road/I fell in love/With a beautiful highway."

Has domestic bliss (Byrne took time out from recording *Naked* to marry designer Adele Lutz, his girlfriend of five years) begun to mellow one of rock's most articulate angry young men?

The overall sound of *Naked* seems lighter, almost happy. Do you agree?

I'm not sure how happy the *whole* album is or sounds. Side One is definitely the more upbeat side, while Side Two paints a darker picture — it explores more familiar Heads territory. But yes, it's true that we aimed for a lighter, less aggressive sound. It's much less aggressive than a lot of what you currently hear on the radio. This record was a deliberate attempt to sound more muted, and cooler and smoother in the way the grooves are played.

Is that why you went to Paris to record?

Yes, we wanted some fresh blood and a little jolt that would take us out of our normal environment. It was a very conscious decision to try something fresh and get away from our usual New York studio and recording methods.

Side One in particular is full of Caribbean rhythms and grooves.

Yes, we worked with a lot of local musicians in Paris, and they're into a whole different scene like Rai, which is this Algerian/Moroccan hybrid, and this Caribbean-sounding music called Zouk. So it all sort of rubbed off on us.

You also brought in an outside producer, Steve Lillywhite (of U2 fame), for the first time in several albums.

That was another factor in *Naked*'s different sound. We all felt it was time to become more objective about our sound and the obvious thing to do was to get a producer to help out. We chose Steve because we all love his work and were particularly interested in his earlier, more unusual stuff, like that album with XTC.

How did you set about recording?

We started off rehearsing ideas in New York, just improvising sketchy things, and then selected material to work on in Paris. Then, in Paris, we added other musicians and gradually restructured the songs, and then started putting down a track every day. We finished quite quickly — in about three weeks — and then I started adding the vocals.

Are you pleased with the results?

Yes, and I'm not always. For instance, *True Stories* should have had less of me singing and more of the cast to be an accurate reflection of what it was. Those songs were really written for other people, but I was talked into doing them myself. On *Naked*, all the songs were for me, but I also changed my voice on some tracks to give some variation to the sound of the album.

The cover of *Naked* features a picture of an ape holding a flower. Any special significance?

I guess it's just a statement that underneath, we're all still monkeys. Some people might interpret that as cynical or jaundiced. But I think it's neither good nor bad, and it's not meant to be depressing or critical. It's just the way things are. It shouldn't deny you any enjoyment of living the way we do. It's just a little reminder.

What do you think of the current music scene?

I think there are a few saving graces, but basically it's not very healthy, at least here in America. I just feel that the younger audience today is disconnected from the production of music. It's not like it was when we started back in '76, and suddenly all these bands surfaced as a reaction to what was going on. We'll go on doing what we do, but I really think it's time for the younger generation to start shaking things up a lot more.

When you say, 'We'll keep doing what we do,' it seems, that as far as the Heads are concerned, that means just records. After all, you haven't toured since 1983's *Stop Making Sense* show. Are there any plans to tour *Naked*?

No. Jerry's already touring for *Casual Gods*, but that's partly because he knew we wouldn't be, so it's unfair to blame him. I really like performing in front of a live audience, but yes, I have pulled back from that 'album-tour' regimen. It's possible we'll go back on the road sometime, but it's not in the works.

Does this mean you plan to spend more time doing films?

I hope so. I'm planning to direct another film this summer, called *Forest*. It's something I wrote in collaboration with Robert Wilson. And I've also been busy finishing up a series of vignettes for the Heads' new compilation video, *Storytelling Giant*. I worked with a casting lady who brought in loads of people, and I'd just let them talk and tape them to see what kind of stories they'd tell. The most bizarre one was this girl who said she'd lived as a dog for two years. She's on the tape.

If you're increasingly involved with film projects, what happens to the Heads? Will they keep talking?

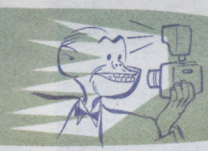
It'd be nice if it can happen. You know, jazz musicians work loosely like that, in a number of different formats. Obviously I'd like to keep going with the music and keep a balance. The problem isn't conceptual. It's the scheduling that gets tough with the other band members. That gets to be a whole job in itself.

WITH NO *plans to tour again in the foreseeable future, what's going on with the rest of the Heads? After inching their way from the cult status of their first albums to the multi-platinum mainstream acceptance of* Little Creatures *and* True Stories, *is that hard-won acceptance now endangered by the band's increasingly splintered solo activities?* Rock Express *contacted Chris Frantz and Jerry Harrison to get their opinions.*

Chris, did *Naked* turn out the way you expected?

I'm not sure what any of us expected or were looking for when we began, but we all knew what we *didn't* want — what we call *MTV* rock. And while we were proud of the last two albums, they were also sort of old-fashioned, with traditional song formats.

TALKING HEADS



So we wanted to get away from that and into this cross-cultural music again.

Jerry, did you approach your solo album, *Casual Gods*, differently from a Heads' album?

Yes, because it was recorded in a basement studio and used a lot of electronics, whereas Talking Heads use more natural instruments. And I did it while the Heads were recording albums like *Little Creatures* and *True Stories*, and investigating the American song form. But I was more interested in continuing to explore the rhythms we'd begun in *Remain In Light*.

Was the solo LP partly born out of frustration with the Heads?

I guess in a way, although it's something I'd have done sooner or later whether we were busy touring or recording as a group. It's actually taken me over four years to do it, anyway — I kept refining and polishing things. But surprisingly, a lot of the early stuff stayed on the album relatively unchanged. What happened was I got interrupted a lot, producing other bands, so there was never a large block of time to get the record finished.

It seems that everyone in the group is busy with outside projects. Chris, what have you and Tina been doing?

The main thing has been trying to finish our next Tom Tom Club album. We've been working on it in between Heads' albums, but during that period we've also had a baby and produced the Ziggy Marley album, *Conscious Party*, so we've been pretty busy.

How did the Marley album turn out?

Great. I think it's a really strong record, and great reggae too. The first single may be a track called *Lee And Molly*, which features Keith Richards on guitar. Ziggy and the Melody Makers are also going on the road.

Jerry, you've produced the Violent Femmes and the BoDeans, are you getting more outside offers?

Yes, and I plan to do as many as I can. I turned down quite a few things so I could do this tour. I've just finished an album for this local act in Milwaukee called Semi-Twang, which should be out now, so I've been pretty busy.

David Byrne appears to be concentrating more and more on film these days. And he says he has no plans to tour again with the group — at least not in the immediate future. Does this mean the end of the Heads is on the horizon? Jerry?

I honestly don't know what's going to happen. Right now, we seem to have settled into this schedule where we just regroup every year and a half to make a record, and that's all. It'd be great to go back on the road as the Talking Heads again, but it certainly doesn't look very likely at the moment, does it?

Do you miss touring?

Absolutely. You need that communication with your audience. It keeps you honest, you might say.

Does it become a problem if you stay off the road too long?

I think so. And the longer you're away, the more pressure there is — not just to do a great show, but to do something *incredibly* spectacular. And then you tend to spend too much time worrying about what you're going to do instead of just getting out there and doing it. That's why I decided to just get out there and do this 10-week tour for *Casual Gods*, in small clubs all over the States. It's really exciting for me.

Chris, do you have any plans to tour?

Tina and I are planning to put some Tom Tom Club dates together over the summer. I think we've already got some offers to play some European festivals, which would be fun.

Do you miss playing live?

A lot. You need that input from audiences. I just hope that after such a long break, the Heads don't lose contact with our fans. That's always a danger. I'm just slightly worried that when we do eventually tour, it's going to look like a comeback tour. But maybe it'll be the comeback tour of the year. □